Aftermath: Women and Gender Issues in Postconflict Guatemala

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Preface

As part of its ongoing studies on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of societies ravaged by civil wars, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) undertook a multicountry assessment of gender issues in postconflict societies. The assessment concentrated on three sets of questions:

- What has been the impact of intrastate conflicts on women? How did these conflicts affect their economic, social, and political roles and responsibilities? What are the major problems and challenges facing women in these societies?

- What types of women's organizations have emerged during the postconflict era to address the challenges women face and to promote gender equality? What types of activities do they undertake? What has been their overall impact on the empowerment of women? What factors affect their performance and impact?

- What has been the nature and emphasis of assistance provided by USAID and other donor agencies to women's organizations? What are some of the major problem areas in international assistance?

The purpose of the assessment was to generate a body of empirically grounded knowledge that could inform the policy and programmatic interventions of USAID and other international donor agencies.

CDIE sent research teams to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. These teams conducted in-depth interviews with key informants, reviewed literature, and conducted fieldwork. They prepared comprehensive reports, which were reviewed by USAID and outside scholars.

This paper, written by Virginia Garrard–Burnett, explains the effects that Guatemala's political violence of the early 1980s had on women and on gender issues in the country. I am grateful to the author for her insightful analysis.

—Krishna Kumar
Senior Social Scientist

Introduction

THIS REPORT addresses the effects Guatemala's political violence of the early 1980s had on women and gender issues in the country. Although Guatemala's struggle lasted from 1960 to 1996, making it one of the longest uninterrupted civil wars in Latin America, the violence between 1981 and 1984 was particularly intense. Thus, the aftermath of this period is the primary (though by no means the exclusive) subject of this study.

The paper consists of four sections. The first section is a historical overview of Guatemala's armed struggle, and includes a discussion of the Guatemalan army's counterinsurgency strategies. Section 2 addresses the physical, psychological, and social impact of the attenuated violence on women and family. The third section examines the economic and political intersection of political violence and gender, with an exploration of the gendered experiences of internal displacement and exile, and the implications of those experiences on gendered and feminist policy. The paper concludes with a series of observations and recommendations for future policy in this area.

1. The Country Context And Nature of the Conflict

GUATEMALA is a country of paradox. Its stunning physical beauty has provided a backdrop for some of the most horrific human rights violations in the Western Hemisphere. Guatemala is the only nation in Latin America with an Indian majority, but its indigenous population, the Maya, has historically been the object of a virulent racism that has left the Maya with some of the lowest social indicators in the hemisphere. Power in the country is vested in a small elite primarily of European origin and in the *ladinos*, a term that applies both to persons of mixed Indian–European descent and to acculturated indigenous people. Guatemala has historically been the richest nation in Central America in terms of economic and natural resources. But decades of political struggle have severely retarded its economic advancement during the second half of the 20th century.

In 1954, the leftist and democratically elected president of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz, was overthrown in a coup by the National Liberation Movement (or MLN), a stridently anticommunist movement trained and funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The Arbenz overthrow and the 1962 rise of the armed opposition set the stage for the tragic drama that has become Guatemala's contemporary history, marked by the motifs of military government, Marxist armed struggle, and three generations of political violence.

After 1954, the Guatemalan state became militarized and highly exclusionary. Employing the rhetoric of anticommunism thought justified by an armed guerrilla movement that enjoyed some support from Cuba, the state manifested a strongly antidemocratic nature. This was clearly evidenced by a political modus operandi that systematically and intentionally 1) closed off political space to political and social movements that in any way challenged the status quo, 2) promoted a system of multiple social exclusions, 3) shrank the balance of power between the legislative and judicial branches of the government to the benefit of the military/executive branch, and, most important, 4) used repression as a substitute for law (CEH 1999, 1–3).

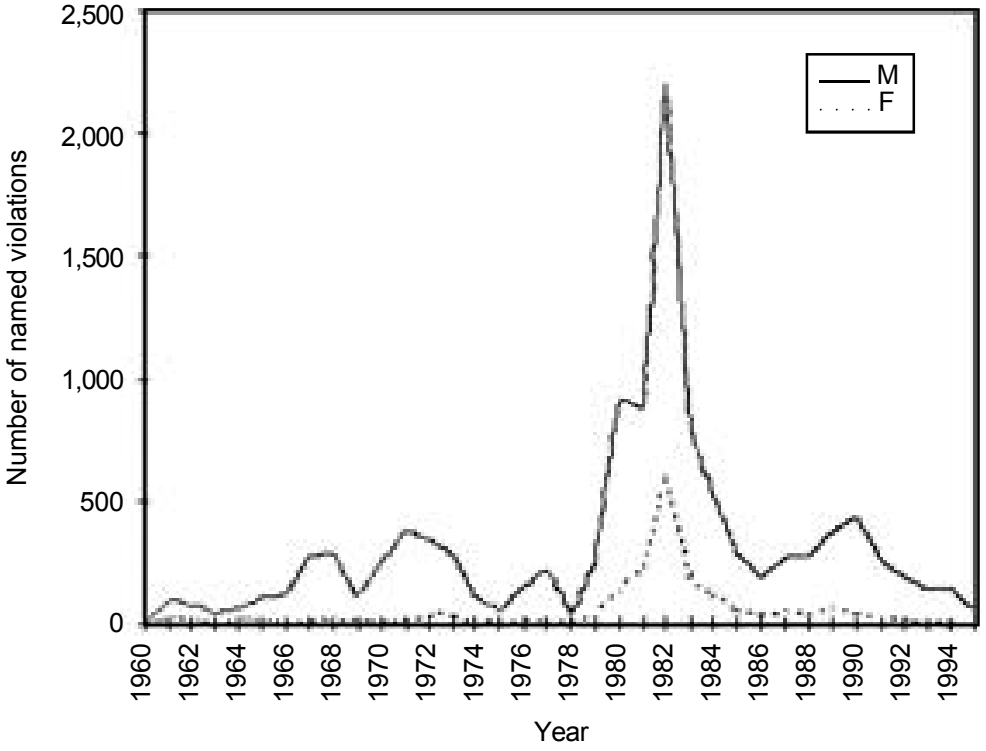
The philosophical underpinning of these practices was the Doctrine of National Security (DSN), which formed part of the anti-Soviet strategy of the United States in Latin America. The U.S. government provided strategic, military, and diplomatic support to the government of Guatemala throughout 1960–96, with the brief exception of the period of the Carter administration, when the United States withdrew official support to Guatemala on the basis of its human rights record. During that period, however, the United States sent military aid to the Guatemalan government through proxy nations.

During the armed confrontation, the state's concept of the "internal enemy," intrinsic to the DSN, became increasingly inclusive (CEH, 3). The scope of this identification is evident in figures derived in two human rights reports published in Guatemala in 1999 and 1998 for the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) and the Catholic Church–sponsored Recuperation of Historical Memory (REHMI) project, respectively. CEH concluded that state forces and paramilitary groups were responsible for 93 percent of the violations documented over the course of the war, while REHMI charged the security forces

with 89 percent of the atrocities committed. CEH estimates that some 200,000 people died or were disappeared during the confrontation; of these, 83 percent were Maya, and about 25 percent were women (CEH 1999, 1; Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998). (See figure 1.)

Although Guatemala's struggle lasted 36 years and repression characterized the entire era, the Ríos Montt took power in a coup in March 1982 and was himself overthrown in August 1983. From the late 1970s, the guerrillas had a substantial presence in certain parts of the country and were thought to have significant links to Cuba, Nicaragua's Sandinistas, and El Salvador's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. The army also believed that the popular resistance enjoyed support among the

Figure 1. Political Killings Between 1960 And 1994, by Gender of Victims



Source: http://hrdata.aaas.org/ciidh/qr/english/chap15.html

type and severity of violence applied against the population varied over time. The era may be summarized as in box 1.

One focal point of this study is the most concentrated period of violence, 1978–85, a time that still leaves in the country a strong imprint of terror and its repercussions. State repression and violence accelerated sharply during 1981–82, corresponding to the scorched earth campaign inaugurated by Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt. This period is referred to simply as *la violencia* (the violence).

indigenous population. The exigencies of this situation elicited the different governments' wholesale assault, patterned after the Maoist axiom to "drain the sea in which the fish swim," which devastated the largely indigenous highlands. By 1983, the army had routed the armed resistance (the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, URNG) and, by its own count, had eliminated 440 indigenous villages entirely. An estimated 20,000 Guatemalans died violently during 1981–83, upwards of 80 percent of whom were Maya (WOLA 1984, v; Bell 1999).

Box 1. Chronology of the Violence

1962–70: Operations primarily in the eastern (ladino) part of the country, Guatemala City, and the southern coast.

1971–77: Repression more selective and geographically dispersed; primarily aimed at community and union leaders, teachers, catechists, and students.

1978–85: The most violent and bloody period of the confrontation. Military operations were concentrated in the (primarily indigenous) departments of El Quiché, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Alta Verapaz, and Baja Verapaz, as well as the southern coast and the capital.

1986–96: Repression on a selective basis, primarily against the Communities of Populations in Resistance.

Source: CEH 1999, 6

Ríos Montt's campaign was so effective from the state's perspective that it is referred to as "the Guatemalan solution" in Latin American military circles. Indeed, the human costs of this tragic period were extraordinarily high. Estimates of the number of people displaced during la violencia range from 500,000 to 1.5 million, including both those who were displaced internally and those who sought refuge abroad.

The variation in these figures reflects the changing nature of displacement. About 150,000 people sought safety in Mexico. Of these, almost a third settled in refugee camps and were given refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Another 50,000 lived as refugees dispersed (almost invisibly) throughout Chiapas, while the remainder settled in Mexico City or other Mexican towns. People also fled (though in far fewer numbers) to Belize and Honduras, as well as to the United States and Canada. Some internally displaced people hid in the mountains, where many became part of the Communities of Populations in Resistance, estimated at 40,000. Others sought the relative anonymity and safety of the city, thus contributing to large indigenous migrations to the capital (CEH 1999). By far, however, the majority of the war's victims remained in their villages within Guatemala, where they tried to rebuild their lives in the wake of the onslaught.

In 1985, the Guatemalan army determined that the armed opposition was sufficiently weakened to permit a return to civilian government. (There was also strong international pressure to do so.) In 1986, Vinicio Cerezo of the Christian Democratic Party was inaugurated president, the first civilian elected in a genuine and free election since the early 1950s, when Arbenz was elected president. Also in 1986, the Legislative Assembly held new elections and promulgated a new constitution. Although Cerezo and his successors were limited in their autonomy from the army, the civilian executive branch of government has steadily gained power in the country since 1986.

> "My father said, 'Let's go, today we have to leave because [the army will] take everyone away.' But my brothers were in Huehuetenango and my mother did not want to go. My mother said, 'If you want to go alone, go, but I am not going; I'm going to stay with my children. When they arrive, who are they going to find? Here I stay. If they kill me, they kill me with my children.'"
>
> — Informant from San Pedro Necta, Huehuetenango, 1982 (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 149)

In December 1996, after 10 years of hard negotiations and with the essential involvement of the international community and civil society sectors, the Guatemala government and the URNG signed the Peace Accords, thereby officially ending the country's 36-year civil war. The accords set high standards for the transition to democracy, for social reconciliation, and for a just and equitable civil society. It remains to be seen how deeply the ambitious mandates of the the agreement will become embedded in the governing ethos of Guatemalan society.

2. The Effects of Violence on Women: *Tristeza* and the Embodiment Of Suffering

Physical and Social Ramifications

BECAUSE MOST of the protagonists in Guatemala's armed conflict were men, most of the victims of state violence were also men. As noted earlier, the CEH investigation revealed that about 25 percent of the direct victims of human rights violations and acts of violence were women. They were raped, tortured, and killed, sometimes because of their ideals and political or social participation, but also in massacres or other indiscriminate actions. Thousands of women were widowed and thus became the sole breadwinners for their children. And because of the destruction of their homes and crops under the scorched earth policy, they often assumed this role without material resources (Bell 1999, chapter 15, 1).

The psychosocial effects of the conflict have had lasting repercussions well beyond the immediate emergency of la violencia. As anthropologist Linda Green states, "Women's bodies have become repositories of the painful experiences they have been unable to articulate as a result not only of being silenced but also because of the nonnarratability of atrocious experiences." (Green 1994, 247) Women who witnessed violence or lost family members continue to suffer psychological and physical ailments, or *tristeza* – literally the embodiment of suffering, or suffering incorporated. Common are physical ailments such as chronic headaches, gastritis, chest pains, visual problems, and respiratory infections and psychological manifestations such as recurring dreams and nightmares, sadness, and depression (PRONICE 1998, 54–55).

The REHMI report compiled a list of psychophysical and emotional ailments that continued to plague witnesses and victims of state-sponsored violence up to two decades after the acts themselves. These included sensations of sadness, feelings of injustice and helplessness, prolonged mourning, psychosomatic problems, eating disorders (specifically hunger), and feelings of isolation and loneliness (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 3).

Tristeza is also manifested in more amorphous physical ills, such as "mournful heart" (*duelo del corazón*) and sleep disturbances from nightmares and other types of compelling dreams. In the case of Maya victims in particular, disturbing dreams have a special significance, because dreams are considered a form of communication with one's ancestors and are a rich reservoir for cultural interpretation (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 45–47).

> Many perpetrators considered rape to be something "natural," of little importance, in the exercise of violence against women and communities.
>
> *Source:* Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 2, 212

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence was a common strategy of the counterinsurgency forces in the early 1980s, as women were threatened, kidnapped, raped, and tortured by the military. As M. Brinton Lykes notes, "Under conditions of . . . state-

sponsored violence, violence against women takes on additional dimensions of horror," a quality the Guatemalan army apparently understood all too well (Lykes and others 1993, 527).

In his study of the violence in the Ixcán, Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla observes that when women were captured and raped by soldiers, they were often forced to cook and clean for them afterward. In at least one case, soldiers, fresh from the bloodlust of a massacre, forced the surviving young women of the village to strip and dance for them; they then raped them (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 2, 213–14). This kind of sexually enforced servitude humiliated and broke women down both emotionally and physically. By invading their work, their homes, and their bodies, the military was able to demonstrate that it fully dominated even the most intimate spheres of the women's worlds (Falla 1992, 132).

Rape is a source of "silent suffering" that soldiers used as a specific weapon of war against Maya women. The guilt and shame of rape victims, compounded by Maya and Latin cultural mores, prevents women from seeking help for the tristeza brought about by the assaults (PRONICE 1998, 54–55). In many cases, women suffer chronic gynecological problems as a consequence of their rapes, for which they are reluctant or unable to seek treatment (Tuyuc 2000).

Although much of the current human rights work in Guatemala specifically seeks to end the shroud of silence surrounding the years of violence and horror, rape is almost never discussed openly. Even the Catholic Church's comprehensive REHMI report does not address the topic in great length or detail. Church and mental health workers, however, report that rape victims continue to feel shame and fear recrimination from their families and communities. As a result, they are more likely than other types of victims to feel isolated and withdrawn from everyday life. Rape victims, like female victims of violence in general, are also more likely to be sharp, impatient, and abusive toward their children, thus passing to the next generation the indirect consequences of the violence they suffered (Utz 2000).

The Mourning Process

In psychological terms, the mourning for a disappeared person is more attenuated than the mourning for a person known to be dead, even when the latter died violently. By the same token, the process of grief is more pronounced and extended over a victim of violent death than it is when a person dies of natural causes. Thus, the process of mourning for the disappeared and the enduring reaction to the violence, in a distinctly Mayan, if not explicitly gendered, sense, have to do with the indeterminate disposition of the remains of victims.

Within the Maya "cosmovision," even among orthodox Catholics and Protestants, there is an ongoing relationship with the dead (Colby 1981). For survivors, this essential relationship cannot be realized fully until the lost relative is known without doubt to be dead and the remains of the loved one are put to rest properly, in a place where they can be honored. Under this cosmovision, without according the dead their proper status, survivors are unable to establish the postlife relations with loved ones essential to maintaining family and community coherence.

In particular, women report ongoing and imperative dreams of lost fathers and husbands from which they cannot find relief until the bodies are located and given proper burials (anon. priest 2000). Such apparitions constitute a disturbing presence for survivors. In one observer's words, "The armed forces literally expelled people from the world of the living, but as death was not expelled, the spirits cannot be disposed of—they form a new sort of patrol, becoming another terrifying presence, persecuting the living. . . ." (Zur 1998, 224.) Be-

cause of such issues, the process of exhumation and proper ritualized reburial is particularly important (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 31).

> A Maya *campesino* [a peasant, countryman, or farmer] was asked why he had not sought refuge in Mexico. His answer was, "Because my father died. They killed him here, and I can't leave him here alone. And I leave him cigarettes and *guaro* [cane liquor, to honor him in death]…. It's important to do, because he enjoyed them and that way he will be content."
>
> *Source:* PRONICE 1999, 42

The Loss of Social Status

The cultural impact of survival has had additional implications. Maya society, like Guatemalan society in general, tends to be extremely patriarchal, with religious brotherhoods, councils of (male) elders, and kinship networks forming the settings of local power and identity. In making the transition from wife to widow, women lost their status relative to their husbands. Maya widows sometimes also lost their places within the local hierarchies of kinship, which complicated issues of patrilineal land ownership and exacerbated legal difficulties tied to women's rightful ownership of titles to land. Women whose husbands have disappeared and whose deaths are not registered in town records encounter particular trouble obtaining title to their husbands' plots of land (EAFG 1995, 287–88).

In traditional Maya society, widows normally have a sanctioned status within the community, where they enjoy respect and support. However, the complex and seemingly arbitrary nature of the violence stigmatized many war widows, who, as a result, did not receive the economic and emotional help they needed from their villages and extended families. This forced widows into a new, highly marginalized social space within their own communities, ostracized from their traditional networks of kinship and other forms of social organization (Winch 1999, 60–61).

The violence also isolated many women from their adult sons, who were called up to serve in the civil patrols or the army, or who decided to serve as *orejas* (literally, "ears") for the military. In addition, many adult sons disappeared from their communities; they were thought either to have joined the guerrillas, abandoned their families to live abroad, or been killed by the security forces. In such cases, the sons' status served to further isolate their mothers within the community at large (Camey 2000, 32–33).

In some locations, the effects of the violence were so pervasive as to leave "cities of women,"

> "I loved my son very much, but I was afraid of him sometimes because he was a spy (*oreja*) for the army. Finally, [the guerrillas] killed him."
>
> — Kaqchikel mother, San Martín Jilotepéque (Camey 2000, 33)

villages in which adult males were effectively absent (OIM 1999, cuadro 3–B). (See table 1.) Although the effects of such a gender vacuum of men were mainly deleterious, the situation did, in some instances, help promote the opening of new political space to fill the void left by the collapse of traditional male-dominated venues of power and authority. Generally, these took the form of widows' organizations and cooperatives that addressed some of the economic and social needs of Maya women who were marginalized not only within Guatemalan society at large, but also within their own communities.

Beyond the traumas brought on by life as a single woman in a society with strictly defined

Table 1. Number of Widows per Village in Three Municipalities In El Quiche

Municipality	Families	Widows
San Miguel Uspantán	824	220
San Andrés Sajcabajá	222	25
San Gaspar Chajul	825	212

Source: USAID-financed OIM 1999, cuadros 3–A and 3–B, 28–29

gender roles, women in Guatemala continue to suffer the long-term effects of la violencia in family life. Those whose husbands returned from the guerrilla forces, abroad, or (particularly) military service suffer the double burden of dealing with male family members who also are affected by trauma and must readapt to life within the family. Wives and husbands must readjust the gender roles of their day-to-day lives. More often than not, a woman who ran the household single-handedly while in exile or in the immediate aftermath of the war finds herself demoted to the previous status quo when she remarries or her husband returns.

The majority of Guatemalan widows do not, however, remarry. Rosalina Tuyuc of CONAVIGUA estimates that only 10 to 15 of the widows of the 14,000 members of that national organization have formally remarried, although more women, reflecting the national pattern, have entered into informal consensual unions with men. While Tuyuc's figures are only a rough estimate, they nonetheless point to the low incidence of remarriage among women widowed by the public violence. The reasons behind the low rate of remarriage are both strategic and circumstantial. Some women do not remarry because they do not wish to subordinate themselves to a new husband. Many others cannot find suitable and willing mates among a pool of men so greatly reduced by killings and disappearances (Tuyuc 2000).

> "They killed my husband. I was left behind, suffering like a little girl. I didn't know how to manage money or work, nor did I know how to provide for the family. See, the life of a woman is among men, and the life of a woman alone with children is hard. I was left like a bird on dry branches."
>
> — Widow from Malacatán, San Marcos (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 227)

Increased Use of Alcohol

The use and misuse of alcohol are common in rural Guatemala. Drunkenness is a customary, even sanctioned, component of the traditional fiesta system, which dates to the 16th century. However, the excessive use of alcohol outside traditional venues has increased in the wake of the violence of the early 1980s. This is equally true both of witnesses to violence and perpetrators of it—that is, men who have served in the civil patrols, the army, or the guerrilla forces. A study conducted for the Guatemalan army shows that upwards of 50 percent of cashiered soldiers become full-blown alcoholics (Nájera 1998, 67).

In addition, male witnesses or victims of violence are more likely than nonvictims or females to drink heavily to try to dull the emotional and psychological aftermath of their ordeals or to help them confront tense or fearful situations (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 49). The increase in male alcoholism has resulted in a concomitant rise in family violence, with an increased incidence of wife or child abuse among male victims of political violence.

Among Maya women, alcoholism was uncommon before the violence. However, anthropologists have noted that by the 1990s, "regular drinking to escape grief and other suffering [had become] fairly common among women." In addition, REHMI reports that the incidence of alcohol abuse among women has increased significantly since the early 1980s (Zur 1998, 212).

> "During our time of repression, it became customary to drink [alcohol] so that we didn't feel fear, but many came to like it and still haven't stopped. [Now] it isn't even considered shameful."
>
> — Widow in Caserío Pachay, Las Lomas, San Martín Jilotepéque, Chimaltenango (Camey, 2000, 27)

Domestic Abuse and a Culture of Violence

Guatemala has no statistical base that keeps data on violent acts against women, nor is there one that measures violence among the families of men who have been part of the armed forces, the security forces, or the armed opposition. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a clear, if anecdotal, correlation between military service and the incidence of family violence (Nájera 1998, 7). In December 1996, Guatemala promulgated a strongly worded law against family violence. It defined a man's violence against his female partner as a violation of her human rights and called for "whatever methods of protection are necessary to protect a woman's right to live in security and dignity." ("Reflexión sobre la Tema 'Mujer y Derechos Humanos'" [n.d.], 15.)

Despite this de jure guarantee of women's rights within the legal or consensual family, certain cultural constraints prevent these decrees from having any teeth. There is a prevailing conception among ladinos and Maya alike that women are, at some level, the property of men. There also exists the stereotype (hardly unique to the Guatemalan milieu) that women who provoke aggression from their husbands or *compañeros* bring it on themselves, and that the aggressors should feel no responsibility toward the victims. This view legitimizes violence against women, even in the eyes of law enforcement officials ("Reflexión sobre la Tema 'Mujer y Derechos Humanos'" [n.d.], 14).

In 1998, the U.S. State Department's Human Rights Report identified intrafamily violence, and particularly violence against women, as a serious human rights problem in Guatemala. In the late 1990s, USAID/Guatemala initiated support of some women's organizations that champion women's rights in the face of abuse (Asociación Mujeres Vamos Adelante 1999, 1 of attachment 2). Despite such efforts, however, family violence and sexual violence against women, inasmuch as they are direct by-products of war, nevertheless remain "silent crimes" that lie outside current models of healing and recovery (Nájera, 69).

One serious issue that must be addressed is that many of the effects of violence are long term and hold the potential to be passed from one generation to the next. Anthropologist Robert Carmack has termed this a "culture of violence," a social construction in which violence, manifested over a long period of time, conditions both individual and group behavior and becomes normative; in simple terms, violence begets violence (Carmack 1988). As a pervasive social construction, the culture of violence may continue to dictate behavior long after the political violence that engendered it has ceased to exist.

The manifestations of the culture of violence are particularly evident in family behavior—in abuse, beating, spousal rape, and alcoholism—which even the perpetrators and the victims themselves may not understand to be the embedded consequence of years of civil violence. In this regard, a gendered response is clearly called for, not only for women but also for men to receive the training and counseling they need to cease abusive lifestyles before they pass them to their sons and daughters. In an unrelentingly *machista* (possessing characteristics of machismo) society, such lessons will not come easily. Indeed, given that most adults in Guatemala grew up in the aberrant climate of armed struggle and institutionalized repression, the task of social reconciliation in postconflict society is unusually challenging.

One of the enduring aspects of the violence of the early 1980s is distrust within some nuclear families. The Guatemalan army encouraged children to inform on family members, and ill-feeling remains among family factions that supported one or another partisan faction during the war. The distrust, hate, envy, and disintegration of cultural unity that resulted from the period of violence continue to have a deleterious effect on nuclear- and extended-family relations (Camey 2000, 27).

A second long-term effect of the violence is evident among the children (many who are now young adults) who were direct and indirect victims of the war. Although this issue is outside the scope of this study, the long-term effects of childhood trauma, social upheaval, displacement, hunger, embedded fear, and wounded parenting have clear implications for Guatemala's young women and men today. This is especially true for children who lost not only close family members, but also their ethnic identity, community affiliation, and spiritual grounding. Among women and men alike, this is a population that is potentially at great risk (PRONICE 1999).

The Economic Aftermath

The rural, primarily indigenous women who were left behind faced nearly insurmountable obstacles in reestablishing lives for themselves and their surviving families without their husbands and other male family members. Their economic plight was paramount. The scorched earth policy, by design, destroyed principal crops, and the small livestock the families owned were often lost, stolen, or killed. Because the division of labor in Maya society dictates that men are responsible for cultivating corn and other subsistence crops and for perennially migrating to the southern coast for seasonal labor, women were forced to absorb the costs of hiring men outside the family to help them tend their fields or assume the job themselves (Zur 1998, 127–37). In the latter scenario, women took on "men's labor" in addition to their traditional tasks of tending small livestock, child care, housework, and weaving, which is both a source of income and vested with cultural and spiritual value for the Maya people (OIM 1999, 38).

In the years since the violence, women heads of household have attempted to branch out into commercial agricultural production, with limited success. This includes the cultivation of coffee on a small scale and the production of nontraditional agricultural crops, such as vegetables and cardamom.

The expansion of agriculture under woman-headed households has aggravated tensions over traditional patrilineal land conveyances and ownership patterns. Though women are permitted by law to hold title to land, they have not done so conventionally, and their access to legal title is hampered by custom, widespread illiteracy, and ignorance of the law. Moreover, many women, and widows in particular, lack access to credit because of the requirement that fathers or husbands cosign loans. Although some community initiatives are addressing this issue, it remains a serious problem, particularly in areas where women make up the great majority of the population (Waugh 1998, 5).

> "[After my husband was killed] I did not know how to get on with life; they left me with four children, two girls and two boys. How it hurt me to see them, how they grew into men and women. I had to race back and forth to work in the field and the kitchen, and my children were so small. They went with me and saw me suffer, and they did too. In the end, I worked a hell of a lot [*yo trabajé un chingo*] to get through those days."
>
> — Widow, Malacatán, San Marcos (Oficina de Derechos Humanos 1998, v. 1, 224)

Even when women can borrow money and gain clear title to their land and plant nonsubsistence crops, the impact on the household of these new forms of production is mixed. Studies show that when a woman-headed household begins to engage in coffee production, greater demands are placed on the woman's time and labor. In addition, nontraditional agriculture places a greater burden on women's time than traditional agriculture, although it also earns more cash (Irwin 1993, 17).

Though the majority of Guatemalan women continue to live in rural areas, the civil violence and the worsening of rural poverty in the war's wake in the early 1980s promoted migration to the city, a pattern that continues today. In 1990, just over 39 percent of Guatemalan women lived and worked in urban areas, compared with less than 37 percent of men (FLASCO 1999). The vast majority of female urban migrants are employed in domestic work and, to a lesser extent, the service industries. However, within the past 10 years, young urban female migrants have been increasingly likely to find employment in *maquiladoras*, foreign or domestically owned factories that produce textiles, paper items, and other commercial products (CALDH 1998, 22–23).

The Gendered Experience Of Exile

During 1981–83 a total of 46,000 Guatemalans were registered and received refugee aid from the government of Mexico and the UNHCR. People from many different Maya and ladino cultural backgrounds were brought together in the refugee camps. There, many also had for the first time the means and support to become organized and access to training, education, health care, and human rights (PSC n.d., 1–3).

Some specific training went to women, who participated in courses on literacy, reproductive health, human rights, and women's educational rights. Many also learned Spanish for the first time, along with the basic ability to read and write. Although Spanish is an essential tool for communication and empowerment, it is also a weapon of assimilation. Refugee women often express the well-founded fear that their children will lose their indigenous languages, traditions, and identities as indigenous people (REHMI 1998, v. 1, 127; Tuyuc 2000). In the Mexican camps, refugee women also worked together in small-scale production projects, through which they earned income and built self-esteem, along with a modicum of leverage within family life (REHMI 1998, v. 1, 127; Tuyuc 2000).

In 1990, the first formal association, Mamá Maquin (named after a highly respected Q'eqchí women killed in the infamous Panzós massacre in 1978), was established to organize female Guatemalan refugees in the three Mexican states where they lived. The objective of Mamá Maquin was to go beyond organizing women on a project-by-project basis and to analyze their status as women within their families and communities. By 1993, there were three such organizations: Mamá Maquin, Madre Tierra, and Nueva Unión, which later took the name Ixmucané. All three sought to address issues specific to women and their families upon their repatriation to Guatemala.

Many families learned hard lessons of gender equity during the years of exile in refugee camps in Mexico. Women were aggressively offered training and empowerment through the good auspices of international aid organizations. However, because their husbands failed to receive similar training and because of the dictates of the context, the women tended to be relegated to a subordinate status upon their families' return to Guatemala.

The expectation was that women would bring the new experiences and skills they had acquired as refugees back with them to Guatemala. After the resettlement of refugees com-

menced in the late 1980s, however, it became clear that the gender training in the refugee camps in Mexico became lost in the process of reintegration. Upon resettlement, women lost touch with one another and could no longer depend on one another for motivation and support. Moreover, the commitment to reconstructing their lives tended to take up the *retornadas'* (returnees') time and relegate them to conventional domestic chores (Consejería 2000).

This same pattern seems the case in families that went into internal exile and became part of the Communities of Populations in Resistance. The CPRs were made up of peasant families that fled their homes in the early 1980s and established covert, mobile communities in the remote areas of northern El Quiché, specifically in the Ixcán region, and in the Petén. Part of the Guatemalan population displaced by state violence, these internal exiles had no access to international relief or any legal status as refugees. In their efforts to elude apprehension by the army, they formed mobile, transient settlements, lived in rudimentary shelters, and survived on foraged foods.

> "The army told us, the people of the CPR/Ixcán, that [we] weren't people, [we] were animals, little bent creatures (*cachos*) with tails, and because of that we weren't around them, and some people [breaking under the stress] believed it."
>
> — Communities of Populations in Resistance member from Xalbal (PRONICE 1998, 92–93)

Because of the unusual hardships, life in the Communities of Populations in Resistance necessitated a breakdown of traditional divisions of labor along gender lines and of the patriarchal patterns of authority. Despite persistent army assaults on the CPRs, in 1990 they began to demand recognition as a civilian population and an end to hostilities, which occurred in 1992. That year, CPR members began to reintegrate themselves into general society. Although their experience of exile is demonstrably different from that of the external refugees, the pattern of reintegration and the resubjugation of women into subordinate domestic roles upon reintegration appear similar to those of the returnees from Mexico. Thus, despite a largely positive experience of increased gender parity in exile, men and women alike tended to revert to the status quo division of labor and power when their lives were recontextualized in their former villages or elsewhere in resettlement.

A "hidden" category of refugees is the thousands of indigenous women who sought refuge from political violence in the anonymity of the city. Although many are still identifiable as indigenous, many others have chosen "ladinozation" as a strategy of survival. As such, these women, along with other *ladinas* who were directly affected by the war, are "below the radar" of most local and international agencies that work for and with female victims of the war.

> "The family had to flee to the capital because the soldiers burned their house. There, [the mother] sold vegetables to survive. Her children grew up with 'capitalist' ideas, and now they neither obey nor help their mother. If her husband, Juan, were still alive, the two of them would have given their children a good education there in the tranquility of their *cantón* [village], amidst the wise old women and the grandfathers. Juan strongly adhered to local traditions [*era costumbrista*], but his children don't know anything about these things because [their father was] kidnapped."
>
> — Q'eqchí woman, speaking of family members who left Lemoa, El Quiché, for Guatemala City in 1981 (REHMI 1998, v.1, 127)

An additional stress on families in the cities is the pressure to relinquish Indian identity. Although some urban migrants intentionally choose this as a strategy to avoid discrimina-

tion, for many others the loss of cultural identity in the city is a highly undesirable side effect of displacement. The loss of culture is a particular source of stress for women, who believe as a result that they have failed to fulfil their socially prescribed roles as purveyors of tradition, culture, and identity. This sense of failure underscores survivors' feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation (PRONICE 1998).

Civilian Security in Rural And Urban Society

Although Ríos Montt's scorched earth policy caused a swath of human and physical devastation so broad that many social scientists have deemed it genocide, his regime also brought a period of enforced peace to the countryside that many Guatemalans view with some ambivalence. The passage of Ríos Montt's Amnesty Law (Ley de Amnistía) in spring 1982 marked a juncture many rural Guatemalans paradoxically recall as a turning point, when political violence became more targeted and less random and capricious (Stoll 1993). Likewise, during the Ríos Montt administration, random urban violence diminished precipitously. It is because of this collective memory of Ríos Montt as a "guardian of law and order" that he retains considerable political currency in Guatemala today.

With the return to civilian government in 1986, however, civilian security began to spiral out of control, especially as cashiered members of the former security forces entered civilian society. By the mid-1990s, social statistics for civilian crimes placed Guatemala City second only to Bogotá in numbers of murders, kidnappings, and other violent crimes per capita among Latin American cities. This period also saw a dramatic rise in reported sexual crimes, including rape and sexual assault (United Nations 1998).

Rural areas too experienced an increase in crime, including banditry, during this period, particularly along major highways and in important tourist centers. However, civilian crime in rural areas did not increase as dramatically as it did in Guatemala City between 1986 and 1998 (United Nations 1998). Nevertheless, civilian security continues to be a critical political issue in Guatemala, as evidenced by the continuing popularity of Ríos Montt in political polls. Security concerns also account for the dominance of his party, the FRG (Frente Republicano Guatemalteco), in the 1999 presidential and national assembly elections.

3. Women in the Political Arena

THE VIOLENCE of the early 1980s pushed an unprecedented number of Maya and ladina women into the political arena. Overwhelmingly, the proximate cause of political mobilization was trauma: the loss or disappearance of a loved one, or the economic and social exigencies of widowhood. Indeed, the most important national and local women's organizations have their origins in trauma. In contemporary Guatemala, human rights and gender are conflated issues in most women's organizations.

There are proportionally a fair number of women serving in elected offices at the departmental and national levels, but women are not as well represented at the municipal level of government. The data are not clear on the reason for this discrepancy, though it may correspond to the highly individualized reasons women enter politics, as described in this section; that is to say, women's political participation is not sufficiently institutionalized as to be manifested in their full mobilization at the local level.

The largest women's organization in the country, CONAVIGUA, emerged as a Maya widow support group in 1988 and now claims more than 14,000 Maya and ladina members nationwide. GAM, a human rights organization modeled after the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, includes men in its activities, but its membership is primarily female, and its organizational prominence has catapulted one of its surviving founders, Nineth Montenegro, into prominence as an important political player in the national arena. The same process has made smaller, local organizations a source of women's empowerment toward social and political advancement in civil society. Examples of these smaller scale organizations are forthcoming in case studies of groups such as Kichin Konojel, the Association of Mayan Ixil Women, and Mamá Maquin (Zamora and Camey 2000).

A second avenue into politics for women has been through direct family connections; that is, a woman enters into politics because of the influence of either a prominent husband or father. In such cases, a women enters politics largely as a proxy for a male family member who was lost to trauma (such as when Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú entered politics after the deaths of her father, brothers, and mother) or as an adjunct to a powerful male family member (such as Zury Ríos Soto, the daughter of Ríos Montt, now a powerful leader

Table 2. Women Elected to Office, 1999–2000

	Diputadas	Governors
1999	13/113 (12 percent)	2/22 (9 percent)
2000	8/113 (7 percent)	6/22 (27 percent

Sources: http://www.c.net.get/ceg/doctos/listadiput.html and
"Participacíon cívico política de las mujeres," 2000, photocopy, no attribution.

Table 2 shows the number of women recently elected to office, and the percentage of total elected offices they hold in each category.

Women's voter participation is relatively high. In the presidential election held at the end of 1999, women accounted for 48 percent of the votes in the first round and 35 percent in the second round. Nevertheless, many women view the right to vote as an extension of their husbands' franchise and tend to vote as their husbands instruct them.

of the Legislative Assembly). In either case, the catalyst for political involvement is closely tied to the woman's traditional roles as dutiful wife and daughter.

The obvious question today is, what happens when the effects of la violencia and the long civil war dissipate? Will there be a political space for women in civil society? Without trauma to expand the parameters of politics within the boundaries of the domestic sphere, will women be willing to enter politics or take advantage of the newly opened public arena? Will women be willing to enter the public sphere if they no longer perceive politics as an extension of the domestic sphere? Certainly, there is a political will from both outside Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, within to ensure that this will be so.

> "My father taught me how to speak."
>
> — Rigoberta Menchú,
> Nobel Peace Prize recipient

> "My case is atypical, in that I learned at the knee of my father, and also my mother is involved in politics. My father is a political leader. I remember that when I was young, I attended political meetings. Many people say I am in office because of my father, but there are many *políticos* whose children aren't in politics, or they aren't good politicians. I've always felt that I had a vocation for public service."
>
> — Zury Ríos Soto

The Peace Accords include several specific agreements that address the rights of women, including the establishment of the Foro Nacional de la Mujer (National Forum of the Woman) to promote women's issues and ensure that the terms of the accords are met (Foro Nacional de la Mujer 1999a; Ibid. 1999b). As powerful *diputada* (representative) Ríos Soto puts it, "The accords are the floor on which a house can be built." There are nearly 150 specific accords, with hundreds of separate mandates. Box 2 offers an incomplete but representative selection that illustrates the tone of the Peace Accords' mandates on women's rights and women's roles in postconflict society.

Since 1996, the National Assembly has promulgated a wide spectrum of laws regarding women's rights within the family, protection against family violence, and women's rights to own and sell land in their own names (Irwin 1993). The Guatemala government has also endorsed the Beijing Platform of Action and the Summit of the Americas (Asociación Mujeres Vamos Adelante 1999). There also has been some political will to create a permanent national institute of women (Instituto Nacional de la Mujer) to guarantee that women's rights are a priority in future legislation and policy planning at the national level (Area de Derechos de la Mujer 1998, 10). Instead, on 22 May 2000, the Secretaría de la Mujer was created, by government decree. Women's organizations, however, feel as though they have lost a battle, because a *secretaría* depends directly on the executive branch of government; an institute would have been a more autonomous entity.

Female political activists across Guatemala's wide political spectrum remain dubious as to the genuine political will on the part of male policymakers toward advancing meaningful legislation and social policy furthering the advancement of women, even in basic areas such as education and women's health (Ríos Soto 2000; Montenegro 2000; Otzoy 2000; Colom 2000). Nor do prominent female political figures tend to embrace a feminist or a specifically gender-based political vision. As Montenegro, cofounder of GAM, a former diputada, and, most recently, vice presidential candidate for the ANN (New Nation Alliance), expressed it, "I am not a feminist. . . . [T]he priority has been social struggle, not simply the needs of women."

For most of the prominent women interviewed, gender questions are most important at the points where they intersect with larger conceptions of social justice. Gender's secondary place on the agenda of priorities is evident across the political spectrum. In the view of former

> "It was strange for me to discover feminism and Islam and about all the other beliefs I had not known in the mountains of Chimel."
>
> — Rigoberta Menchú

guerrillera Yolanda Colom, "The oppression of women is not separate from the revolutionary movement," but is nonetheless subordinate to the oppression of the poor by the dominant class. For Montenegro, "Men have stereotypes of women and women have stereotypes of men. There is no solidarity, but it's the fault of the system that they haven't dropped these prejudices to be able to work with one another." According to Ríos Soto, women are not proportionally active in national politics because "the work demands discipline, and many women don't have it."

What is important, however, is the intersection of social reconciliation, political development, and gender. Common points of juncture include such issues as human rights and, most emphatically, education for girls, an issue raised by nearly every female political figure in this study. Prominent women in politics all argue that the woeful lag in basic education for girls is the single greatest source of gender inequity in Guatemala, and as such is a critical issue that must be addressed, even at high political cost. Nevertheless, even for women in politics, gender seems a secondary category of analysis, behind ethnicity or nongendered political ideology.

Despite some promising and tangible signs of advancement, there are a number of obstacles

Box 2. Selections From the Peace Accords That Address Women's Rights

Global Agreement on Human Rights

- Guarantee rights for women
- Eliminate discrimination against women
- Ensure women's right to participate in civil power

Agreement for the Resettlement of Populations Displaced by the Armed Confrontation

- [Provide] guarantees for the resettlement of the displaced populations. . . to place particular emphasis on the promotion of families headed by women, particularly women and orphans who have been most affected

Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples

- Criminalize the sexual harassment of indigenous women
- Combat the discrimination against women in agrarian reform

Agreement on [the] Strengthening of Civil Power and the Rule of the Military in a Democratic Society

- Strengthen women's organizations in rural and urban settings

Agreement on Socioeconomic Issues and the Agrarian Reform

- [Provide] equality of opportunities and conditions, promoting women's access to study, training, credit, land, and productive and technological resources
- [Foster the] participation of women in economic and social development
- Promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- Recognize the undervalued contribution of women in all aspects of economic and social activity, particularly [their] work in favor of improving the community

Sources: Morales Trujillo 1997; Waugh 1998, 3

that stand in the way of vindicating women in the wake of Guatemala's long war. Despite the pivotal Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Peace Accords and some significant social will toward correcting Guatemala's deep-rooted racism, indigenous women still labor under a double stigma. This is true of the victims of the 1980s' violence most of all. However, because nearly 20 years have passed since the worst conflagrations of civil violence, it is important that policy also be directed toward those women whose posttraumatic stress is not so apparent in contemporary civil society.

> "We are discriminated against . . . at work, in everything . . . for being women, for being poor, for being Indian."
>
> — Carmen C., a Kaqchikel Maya from San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango, now living in Guatemala City (Winch 1999, 60).

4. Lessons and Recommendations

PROGRAMMATIC AID in Guatemala should continue to assist those women and orphans who were directly affected by the violence of the early 1980s. USAID has an existing, coherent program of support built around the implementation of the Peace Accords. Many projects under that program specifically support the gendered needs of widows, returnees, and other direct victims of the violence (USAID 1999). However, the Agency should carefully monitor the efficacy of these projects to ensure that other foreign monies do not overly dictate the programmatic mandates of the projects, isolate the leadership of grass-roots women's organizations from their core membership, or generate excessive dependence by the leadership or base on foreign money.

An important policy implication of these findings is that the effects of Guatemala's conflict are embedded deeply in its people. Most adults cannot remember the time before their government was at war with the people. The effects of long-term state-sponsored violence must be taken into full account in the promotion of social reconciliation in civil society. To this end, programmatic planning must address both the direct and indirect consequences of the violence. It is critical that USAID support programs and entities that deal with the effects of the violence over the long term, such as organizations that address long-term mental health issues among victims, personal security for women and children, cultural reconstruction, and conflict resolution.

It is also essential that USAID understand the consequences of Guatemala's violence in the broadest possible terms, as the violence is what brought to the fore many serious problems that confront civil society today and will continue to do so unless they are addressed decisively. Because it is often most effective to confront these kinds of deeply ingrained problems from a culturally appropriate perspective, USAID should identify and support local programs that work effectively in the following areas:

- Alcoholism
- Long-term grief and depression
- Conflict resolution
- Family violence
- Sexual crimes
- Poverty, especially among Maya
- Cultural loss and anomie resulting from urban migration and displacement
- The various causes of the war, including inequity, exclusion, oppression, lack of democracy, and inhibitions to participation

It is equally important that assistance programs be framed around gendered policies. It is also crucial that women's issues and needs be addressed with great intention and with specificity. Nevertheless, gender-based solutions should never be "ghettoized."

Gender or "women's" projects should not be overemphasized at the expense of other areas of need. This recommendation stems from the complaint that women's organizations rarely receive funding for projects that are not overtly women-specific, even when such projects have clear but implicit gender implications. By the same token, there is also evidence that some

organizations have "hijacked" the rhetoric of gender as a tactic to gain outside funding, even when gender is not truly a primary or even secondary emphasis of their work (Morton 2000, 14). In short, great care should be taken in evaluating both the implicit and the explicit gender implications of projects that come under consideration for funding.

Gender mainstreaming is mandated within USAID, but, as in many other contexts, it is a policy that is not realized to its full potential. A truly gendered response demands recourse for both women and men. (The absence of men in gender training, for example, hampered the status of women refugees upon their return to Guatemala.) Although USAID/Guatemala should take justifiable pride in its support of many programs that address the immediate needs of Maya war widows, it could strengthen its programmatic support in dealing with the war's secondary effects, particularly regarding traumatized men. Until the conflict's effects on men are also addressed directly, the adverse situation of women can improve only incrementally.

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